

supplement and even replace the support of the family. The special needs of the aged are specifically recognised in every branch of social activity.

In the Indian society also, there is recognition of the responsibility of the larger society to look after the aged. Article 41 of the Indian Constitution enjoins the state to make effective provision of public assistance for the benefit of the disadvantaged and weaker sections including the aged. However, the policies and the programmes, which the government has undertaken so far, touch only the fringes of the problem of the aged.

We may refer to three main steps the government has taken in connection with the problem of the aged. First, the government has enacted legislation to affirm the duty of every person having sufficient means to maintain and look after his aged or infirm parents who are not able to maintain himself or herself. This step of the government only boils down to overseeing the traditional role of the family of providing support for the aged. This legislation, however, is of no material use as no parent is willing to go to a court of law to extract support from an unwilling child.

Box 1

Social Security For the Aged

A section of the aged are the retired persons from the organised sector. They are provided social security by the employers in the form of pensions, provident fund, and gratuity etc. However these sections may not get sufficient emotional support from their families. Their families may not meet their entertainment needs. Hence they have to be accommodated somewhere by the state. Again, a major group of the aged is of those who retire from unorganised sector without any social security benefit. They have also to be accommodated and given social security in case they have no family. In India, there are few state-run homes for aged. The State and the Central Governments provide financial assistance to the voluntary agencies to set up such homes and to take up innovative programmes for providing services to them. There are also schemes of pensions of old age in all states and union territories. Through the criterion of eligibility differs, generally destitute, poor and infirm aged of 60 and above, are provided pensions at rates ranging from Rs. 30 to Rs. 100 per months (India 2000)

The second step the government has taken, is to assume partial responsibility for supporting destitute aged who do not have earning children or children with sufficient income to support them. The government provides old age pensions to the destitute aged, as well as, gives grants- in-aid to institutions, which take care of such persons. The old age pensions, however, consist of meagre amounts barely adequate for subsistence.

The third step the government has taken in respect of the aged is to pass legislation to ensure retirement benefits, such as, gratuity, pension and provident fund, to be paid by the employers to the aged who are compulsorily retired. Such legislation applies to the larger enterprises and, as such, these benefits are derived by only a small segment of the aged.

Besides the government, there are a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which offer various kinds of services to the aged. The services provided by the NGOs include:

- a) Institutional services in the form of old-age homes,
- b) Vocational services and occupational therapy
- c) Non-institutional support systems including medical, psychiatric and rehabilitation services, nutritional care, recreation, counseling, education, training and awareness, and
- d) Day care centres.

Although this list is impressive; these services are available only in some nooks and comers of the country and that too in the big cities.

You will realise from the above discussion that the vast majority of the aged is not covered by any public provision of old-age support whether extended by the Government or the NGOs.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) In what important respects the situation of the aged women is different from that of the aged men? Answer in eight lines.

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- 2) Why was the social adjustment of the aged more satisfactory in the past? Answer in six lines.

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- 3) Why is the social adjustment of the aged less satisfactory now a day? Answer in eight lines.

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20.8 LET US SUM UP

We may now sum up the main points discussed in this unit. In general the aged are faced with problems, because of adverse events in their biological, psychological and sociological spheres of life. Their adjustment in this difficult period of their life is either facilitated or rendered more difficult by the socio-economic and cultural factors during their lifetime, which are influenced by historical events.

The socio-economic and cultural factors in the past were conducive to a more satisfactory social adjustment of the aged. Their proportion in the population was small and their family was adequate to provide them with the necessary support and care.

In the present times, change in the socio-economic and cultural system has rendered the social adjustment of the aged difficult. Their percentage in the population is increasing, the family as their support system is becoming weaker, and alternative public support systems are not coming up fast enough.

Developing societies, such as India, which are subjected to economic development and modernisation are experiencing an increasing degree of deterioration in the situation of the aged. In India, although the percentage of the aged in the population is not very high compared with the developed countries. It is progressively increasing and their absolute number is enormous. At the same time, the economic, health-care and social needs of this enormous number of the aged are rapidly increasing. These changes are accompanied by the changes in the family structure which is losing its efficacy as a support system for the aged.

The problem of the aged in India has, therefore, clearly become a social problem which makes it incumbent upon the society to assume greater responsibility for the support of the aged. But the development of the public support system is still in a nascent stage.

In a nutshell, we have discussed the nature of the problem of the aged, demographic characteristics, economic characteristics, health condition and social adjustment of the aged, besides focusing on and examining the public policies and programmes for the aged.

20.9 KEY WORDS

- Demographic transition** : The social process whereby a society moves from the condition of high fertility and high mortality to one of low fertility and low mortality.
- Fertility** : Average number of children born to women in a society.
- Geriatrics** : The branch of medicine, which deals with the problems and diseases of old age and aging people.

Life expectancy : The average span of life which children born at a given point of time can expect to live.

Old dependency ratio :
$$\frac{\text{Per cent of Population of 60+ age group} \times 100}{\text{Per cent of Population of 15-59 age group}}$$

Young dependency ratio :
$$\frac{\text{Per cent of Population of 0-14 age group} \times 100}{\text{Per cent of Population of 15-59 age group}}$$

20.10 FURTHER READINGS

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Kimmel, Douglas-C. 1980. *Adulthood and Aging*, John Wiley & Sons: New York.

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20.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The problem of the aged arises because the aged have to adjust in society when they are faced with certain crucial events while they are growing old. One type of these events are the changes which take place in their biological, psychological and social spheres of life. The other type consists of socio-economic changes which take place during the historical phase in which they are living.
- ii) The growing proportion of the aged in the population is due to the declining fertility and increasing longevity of the population. These are the characteristics of the demographic transition which is brought about by economic development and modernisation.
- iii) The young dependency ratio is obtained by dividing the percentage of the population in the age group 0-14- by that in the age group 15-59, and by multiplying the quotient by 100. Likewise the old dependency ratio is obtained by dividing the percentage of population in the age group 60+ by that in the age group 15-59 and by multiplying the quotient by 100. In recent times the young dependency ratio has begun to decline and the old dependency ratio has begun to increase.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) In general, the aged tend to withdraw voluntarily from the work force when their capacities decline very much. But when the economy gets organised, the aged are non-voluntarily made to retire even when they are capable of performing their duties. Thus, as the Indian economy is becoming more and more organised the percentages of the aged who are withdrawing from the working force are increasing continually. As a result of this process more and more aged are becoming dependent on others.
- ii) The aged suffer more from chronic diseases than infectious ones as compared with the general population. They also tend to be physically

handicapped to a greater extent. The pattern of incidence of the chronic diseases among the aged varies according to rural-urban and genders differences.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) The aged women as compared with aged men are less educated, participate in the work force to a lesser extent and are economically more dependent on others. The percentage of aged women, who are without spouse, is far greater, than in the case of aged men. There is a marked difference in the patterns of living arrangements of aged men and women; whereas men live with their spouse or all alone to a larger extent, the women live more often with their own children or other relatives.
- ii) In their social adjustment in the past, the aged was greatly aided by their families. The peculiar structure and function of the family in the past were advantageous for the adjustment of the aged. In particular, the fact that the family was also a production unit and that the productive assets of the family were controlled by the aged, protected the status and security of the aged.
- iii) Nowadays, the economy is becoming increasingly industrialised and organised, which is depriving the family of its production function. The younger relatives are less economically dependent upon the aged and on the contrary the aged are becoming more dependent upon their younger relatives. In the changing circumstances, the number, ability and disposition of the care-givers to the aged in the family are declining. The aged-are, thus, finding their social adjustment more difficult.

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